The Rev. Donald Benedict, director of the Chicago Missionary Society, commenting on the societie's mission to the inner city and the slum areas of Ch of Chicago said, "the church must work twenty four hours a day to keep alive the rumoor that there is a god". Mr. Benedict's sobering statment could indeed apply to the surban church and the church at large with a few modifications. That there is a God is not the major problem facing most of christianity. Our job is in keeping alive the rumor that God is present: and that in the complexitiies of modern society the Christian Faith is relevant.

The facts seem to slap us in the face at the onset. Using the early church as our guide, measuring the chirch of today against the church of the first century, our conclusion must be one of the following; either the ~~church~~ FAITH as such, and the church of Jesus Christ are totally irrelevant, or else modern day christians simply don't know what it means to be Christians. Our immediate concern today is Stewardship, but I hesitate evn to use the word: for Stewardship is not something other than Christianity. It is not even o one area or category of Christian activity. -- It is Christianity. That we must set aside a few weeks in the fall to talkm about stweardship; that the church has to send visitors into every home to solicit funds; that the church in many instances has had to employ slogans, gimmicks, tricks, projects, and dinners to carry on its mission is the most telling indictment that modern American Christianity is not completely Christianity. For if it were true all this rigamarole would be unecessary.

If we had to lay our finger on one point and say " here is the basic irrelevancy and weakness of ~~the church~~ contemporary christianity" it would have to be that somehow we hve lost any sense of the presence of God. The Biblical witness, in the chosen people Israel, int the voices of the prophets, in the life , death, and resurection of Jessus Christ, and of twenty cent. of church history, is that God is present in his greation, that creation exists becuase of his grace and will, and that he is constantly bombarding h ~~his creation with~~ his creation with self initiated acts of revelation. The Biblical witness is that God is present, that he has a will, an intention for his crea tion and creature;

a benevolent despot who has thouroughly spoiled his children by allowing them to do as they please and thusly proven that he really doesn't care. If the latter is true we are wasting our time.—My profession is a gentle joke on all its members, this building is an expression only of a dream, and your presence in it an act of dishonesty. If God is not present we might as well go home. If he is present we have some thinking to do.

We might ask where did we go wrong? At what point in history did man begin to lose the sense of God's presence and purpose. It's a little dangerous to be too specific here and yet I don't think that point is too far in the past. It wasn't very long ago when there was a certain basic unity about life. A man and woman built their life out of the raw tools of nature; if it was a Christian home these were obviously God given gifts. A man could see the magnificence of God's creativity because he lived in and with it. He slept in the house that he had constructed from trees he cut down. He ate the food that he grew in his fiels. He dailty felt the warm earth on his hands and the hot sun on his back. He lived close to nature, he witnessed the drama of life, living, dying, being recreated in nature's miraculous regeneration. This was a man who could not helpt but feel the presence of God. And if this man was a Christian he could know that there was a purpose behind his life.

Needless to say things are a little different today. We live in a world so far removed from the world of nature that any sense of God's wondrous works is hard to come by. The vast majority of people today never take the elements of nature and create anything; never have the opportunity of adding the finishing touches to the work of their own hands. Carpenters that one day built homes in which to live, cabinets and barns, now pound nails into pre-cut wood. Housewives, the last bastion of grass-roots creativity, now bake cakes out of boxes, ~~save~~ serve t.v. dinners and instant mashed potatoes (all the women of this church not with standing). It is simply very difficult to feel that one is living in the presence of God's many gifts when every article

of God's goodness than the humble plow. I had an experience once that has determined my thinking about the presence of God ever since. I worked in the Ford stamping plant one summer and it was an experience I will always count as invaluable. At first it seemed like another world into which I had been thrust. From the early morning sunshine, the birds awakening and the dew on the grass one entered a world of grease, dirt, sweat and the thunder of deafening noise. One mroning as I made this transition I found mhself absent mindedly humming the tune ("The Lord is in his Holy Temple.") It seemed completely ~~absent~~ absurd at first. Surely this ~~monument~~ monument to man's technological prowess, this monster that turned men into machines that rotely pushed buttons all day was as far from a Temple of God as anything could be. But then it occured to me that perhaps here is where I and most of the world have been missing the point. Perhaps this was a temple of God. Here at the very basis of culture, where money is earned, where steel is turned into ~~ob~~ objects that are the essence of life, here perhaps God was truly present. Perhaps the stamping plant is a Temple--as truly as any other place.

The point is that we do not believe in a God who restricts his presence to church, or who restricts his presence in our lives to our soft and sentimental emotions. Our faith is not one that is dominant in ~~are~~ only one aspect of life. To be Christian means to be Christian every minute of everyday. To say ("I believe in God the Father Almihty, maker of heaven and earth") means that God is present throughout heaven and earth, that his presence and his will pervades everything that is. To affirm this is to say thatI will always be alert to God's presence, ready to hear his call, willing to negate my will before his.

The church, however, instead of proclaiming this has ~~instead~~ tried to exist by seelling something called religion. We invite, persuade, beg, use high pressure techniques, and subtle slogans to get people in the doors. When they

Next Sunday is Stewardship Sunday; and on that day visitors will call in the homes of every member of the church. Their purpose will be to explain the why's and how's of the church's program and they will ask your commitment to it. When they finish you will be given the opportunity of expressing that commitment by pledging part of yourself, in dollars and cents to Christ and his church.

~~Many~~ Some will interpret this as fund raising in disguise. But let it be said that this church does not want a pledge made begrudingingly; we do not want money that was given in resent. Our highest hope is that this periodic emphasis on Stewardship will cause you to think about all I have said this morning. In the next week I ask you to think seriously about the presence of God; to consider the source of all life, the source of your ability to live and move and work and enjoy. Then you will be ready to decide in what ways and to what degree does God will that you respond to his presence.

Stewardship is Christianity, alive and vital. Christianity minus STewardship is irrelevancy. May God add his belssing to our efforts-- and may his presence envliven and awaken us to a new level of service and discipleship. Amen